

IN MEMORIAM

FREDERICK N. HAMERSTROM
1909–1990

Frederick Hamerstrom, known to most people as “Hammi,” died in March in a log cabin overlooking coniferous forests and the rushing waters of Oregon’s North Umpqua River—a scene symbolic of the beauty and the wild landscape that he loved all his life.

With Fran, his wife and teammate for 60 years, he pioneered in the field of wildlife research, delving into the ecology, life history, and management of prairie chickens, sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants, bobwhite quail, great horned owls, hawks, ospreys, sandhill cranes, white-tailed deer, and furbearers. He was one of the world’s foremost authorities on grouse, and is best known for his landmark research on prairie chickens and the development of a habitat management plan involving preserving a scatter pattern of grassland areas to provide essential life support—a strategy that saved the disappearing prairie chicken in Wisconsin and one that is used now in the management of other critical species and habitats elsewhere in the country and in the world.

After graduating from Harvard with a degree in English Literature, he turned to his love of wildlife, and with Fran embarked on a career of wildlife research and management long before such a field was formally established. He earned an M.S. under Paul Errington at Iowa State University, and a Ph.D. under Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin. His field studies took him to Necedah, Wisconsin as a project game manager for the Resettlement Administration, to the Edwin S. George Reserve of the University of Michigan as a field biologist, and to Portage County in central Wisconsin where he led the prairie grouse research for the Wisconsin Conservation Department and its successor the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for 23 years.

His studies, speaking engagements, and participation in international meetings have taken him throughout the United States and Canada, Mexico, Europe, Russia, and Australia.

Hammi worked closely with Fran in raptor research and helped form the Raptor Research Foundation. Besides working with eagles and a variety of hawks and owls in Wisconsin, they spent the last 17 winters trapping and banding Harris hawks in Texas, and carrying out nesting studies on ospreys in Mexico.

He was not only a researcher, but an author (authored or coauthored with Fran 69 technical papers, and reviewed some 40 others) and a meticulous editor of countless writing efforts of students and peers alike. He was also an outstanding teacher, not in the classroom, but as he worked with students and colleagues in the field and patiently instructed thousands of volunteer observers about to enter the prairie chicken blinds. Many honors came to Hammi and Fran, among them the Wildlife Conservation Award of the National Wildlife Federation (1970), two Wildlife Society Publication Awards in 1940 and 1957, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Research Award (1973), and the United Peregrine Society Award (1980). Since 1972 both Hamerstroms have served as adjunct professors in the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

The name Frederick Hamerstrom will forever be in the annals of natural science. He was world-renowned, but he preferred to continue his simple life, without a lot of modern amenities, in tune with the land. His keen mind continually kept track of new research developments, helped young wildlife ecologists write in clear concise language, encouraged Fran (he was her best critic and editor) in capturing their life and times in her books. In unselfishly offering his help to so many others he often deferred his own personal agenda. There was an elegance about this soft-spoken gentle man, and a deep conviction about the integrity of the natural land community, with wildlife an integral part—for the role it played in the community, and for the thrill it provided in the hunt.

His devotion to accurate wildlife research is shown in this anecdote that Fran tells. They had trapped and banded 1200 Harris hawks in Texas and examined 70 feathers on each one. “Darling, don’t you think we have enough?” “I don’t think so,” Hammi answered, “but we’re mighty close.”—**Ruth L. Hine, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (retired), 3609 Nakoma Rd., Madison, WI 53711.**